

# Would Marx be proud of Marxism's achievements?

In a few weeks it will be the centenary of the death of a 65-year-old man whose writings and name alone have done such vast injury to the modern world. Were this man alive today he would undoubtedly repudiate his successors, those who justify lying, cruelty, genocide and anti-democratic revolutions in the name of the proletariat.

It was on a Wednesday, at 2:45 in the afternoon of March 14, 1883, that Karl Marx died peacefully in his easy chair at his home in Highgate, a London suburb. I say he would have repudiated today's Marxists — from Lenin to Stalin to Andropov, from Mao to Deng, from Fidel to Jaruzelski — because toward the end of his life, Marx, wearied by controversies carried on in his name, reportedly told a French follower, *Mais, moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste* — "But I am not a Marxist."

It is the irony of Marx's existence that had there been no Lenin to reinterpret the Master's prose and prescriptions, Marx would today be one of dozens of Utopian philosophers whose names are listed in intellectual histories and are as quickly forgotten, except by academics. And it is even greater irony that it was a Russian who ensured his fame, because both Marx and his co-worker, Friedrich Engels, despised not only the Czarist regime but also Russian revolutionaries like Bakunin.

Marx was a fortunate man, especially in having a surname that could so easily be transformed into a philosophy by adding the suffix "ism." Imagine had his name been Engels or Plekhanov or Bernstein; the "ism" wouldn't have worked. We have Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Hitlerism, but no Mussolinism; the centenary of his birth occurs later this year.

He was also fortunate in that he was living in the age when science had become a blessed and popular subject and the word "scientific" had become the secular response to Victorian religiosity. Marx and Engels stuck the word "scientific" before their version of "socialism" (there were many varieties) and what until then had been a collection of declamatory statements and apocalyptic prescriptions suddenly became the New Science of Society.

Professor Lewis S. Feuer of the University of Virginia is one of the leading students of contemporary ideologies. In the January issue of *Midstream*, he has done an analysis of the crisis of Marxism which is one of the

most important and original pieces of critical writing about Marx to have been published in years. He demonstrates how Marx's prophecies have been overrun by events to a degree which should have weakened the hold of Marxism in the western world. Instead Marxism and its infinite varieties has a greater hold on the American academy than ever before. It is Marxolatry run wild.

Feuer cites the "Communist Manifesto," the joint effort of Marx and Engels, which predicted that as countries become communist, the "hostility of one nation to another will come to an end." Feuer writes:

"The fact of the matter, however, is that communist countries within a few years have come to hate each

other far more than present-day capitalistic ones do, and that imperialism, far from being the last stage of capitalism, turns out to be the contemporary stage of communism."

Marx predicted that the working class would fulfill its historical mission by bringing about the overthrow of capitalism — the working-class would be its grave-diggers, he said — and the reign of communism. Instead neo-Marxists from C. Wright Mills to Herbert Marcuse, like Leon Trotsky before them, repudiated Marx's idea of the working-class as the liberating force "and demanded outright the rule of the intellectuals, which, in any case, has always been their unconscious goal,"

Feuer says. Trotsky actually went further and said that

the unopposed existence of Stalin's "bureaucratic state," (unopposed, that is, by the proletariat) demonstrated "the congenital incapacity of the proletariat to become a ruling class."

The most significant change in Marxism, as its tenets have proven helpless either as analysis or prophecy, has been the rise of what is popularly called "Neo-Marxism," which Feuer defines "as the ideology of the intellectual class conceiving itself as the bearer of the Socialist mission." The "essential traits of Neo-Marxism" are its preference for philosophy rather than economics and the establishment of its base in the universities, not in the trade unions. Says Feuer:

"If one makes a survey of Marxist journals, one finds almost none that are directed to workingmen. By contrast, it is a mark of intellectual ferment for a given university department to house a Marxist journal for its field. Neo-Marxist journals have thus proliferated in departments of history, sociology, German, economics, philosophy and anthropology. . . . The bourgeois universities are the ecological niches for overground Marxist cells."

Perhaps the greatest irony which afflicts contemporary Marxism is the continuing repression by military power in the communist states of the rights of workers to be free of government control. The crushing of workers' revolutions in modern times has taken place in Communist-ruled countries — in East Germany, 30 years ago on June 17, 1953; in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and, on three occasions, in Poland. And, of course, Soviet workers are among the most enslaved and exploited of any working class, along with the workers of China, Vietnam, Cuba and other Socialist regimes. The "anti-working class" ethos of the neo-Marxist intellectual in democratic countries finds a parallel in the thunderous military repressions of the Socialist countries.

To be fair, Marxism as represented in the Socialist countries has demonstrated three major achievements in its competition with capitalism. First, an extraordinary ability to produce big armies and armaments while their people live on meager rations, shoddy consumer goods and substandard housing. Third, an extraordinary ability to inspire their peoples to emigrate from socialist countries to capitalist countries. What would Marx say could he see the monstrous Berlin Wall, this monument to his doctrines? I doubt that Marx would have taken pride in such achievements after 65 years of the Russian Revolution.



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